MAY 11, 2021 BOE MEETING:
COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

RECEIVED: APRIL 21, 2021

Patricia Hayn
289 Lebanon Ave
Colchester

I am Not in favor of this Budget. I will Vote NO.

RECEIVED: APRIL 21, 2021
Good morning,

I was unable to attend the Board of Ed Budget Workshop last night, but wanted to show my support for the education budget.
I am in favor of the Education Budget and would like to see it passed. I feel it is a fair budget for our district.

Thank you for all you do for our students!
Dina Graham

RECEIVED: APRIL 22, 2021

Dear Colchester School Board Members,

I am writing today as a parent, a concerned citizen, and as an educator. It has now been over a year since a global pandemic was declared and Bacon Academy, along with the rest of the schools, were closed. Over a year that has been anything but normal for all of us. A lot has changed over the last year and we have learned a lot about the virus. The CDC website currently asserts,

"Given the crucial services schools offer and the benefits of in-person learning, it is critical for K–12 schools to open and remain open for in-person instruction, as safely and as soon as possible. ***Schools should be the last settings to close because of COVID-19 and the first to reopen when they can do so safely.*** *Working together, school leaders and community members can take actions to keep schools open for in-person learning by protecting students, teachers, and school staff where they live, work, learn, and play."*

Connecticut's Governor recently announced a plan to remove all restrictions except the mask mandate by May 19, 2021. In Colchester, this means that the bars will be open before our high

school unless all of you act. There is no health reason not to reopen the schools. We know that transmission is not happening in schools. The risk to staff is also minimal—Connecticut wisely chose to prioritize teachers and staff and now all educators have had the chance to get the vaccine if they wanted it.

As I wrote to both Principal Peel and Superintendent Burt after learning of their decision not to fully reopen, it is time to bring our students back—all of them, and I say that as an educator whose wife is working as a Nurse Practitioner in the hospital. My family advocated strongly for the hybrid model in the fall, but that time has passed. Are we really going to be the district where the bars are open before the schools? What message does this send for our students?

As an educator, I can tell you that we all know that hybrid learning is not as good as in-person. It is not even close. I have seen the difference between hybrid and in-person in my classroom. I can see the life drain out of both of my daughters' faces after a day of Google meets—which are highly ineffectual (go sit in on a full day of meets for a complete school day for a couple of weeks and tell me what your learning experience is). There is going to be an entire population that will be permanently left behind after this year and I fear that prolonging the current model will only grow that population. At the same time, the impacts are not limited to those students who are struggling—even gifted and talented students like my daughters have suffered over the last year.

Second—how is it that towns like Lebanon, right next door to Colchester, have managed to have their high school open since October? East Hampton is also full-back in (with fewer cases than they had under hybrid—likely because students aren't out doing stupid risky things). RHAM is also back in. Hall in West Hartford is also full-time (also with fewer cases than they had under hybrid). Teachers were prioritized for the vaccine to get kids back to school—not to continue with remote and/or hybrid models.

Third—I heard a lot of concern about preserving special events like the prom. So are we more worried about the prom than we are about actually educating the entire student population? What about all of the other missed events? I hear complaints every day from my 6th grader about how she missed all the special 5th-grade events and has gotten to do none of the normal 6th-grade events (dance, etc.). Same from my 9th grader about missing both the end of her 8th-grade experience as well as her freshmen experience. At this point, I think we should give up on the social aspect until we can get the kids into the building full time. The priority needs to be on academics. And I am pretty sure that prom is not a COVID-friendly event—no matter how you spin it—although given the updated restrictions that are coming maybe prom is possible. But again, what message are we sending when we prioritize prom over a return to full-time in-the-building education?

Fourth—this kills my daughter, and many other kids, for sports. There is no way I can get her to track practice 3 days a week in this model (my wife and I are both essential workers who report to work every day). So not only is she is missing school, but she is also missing sports. Talk about insult to injury here.

Fifth— Community spread is much lower than February and vaccination rates are rising rapidly. By May 1st, the vast majority of adults in Colchester will have had the opportunity to be vaccinated. Not to mention there will be a portion of students over 16 who may be vaccinated as well.

I would like to be added to the citizen comments during the next board meeting. We need to reopen now. The teachers and staff have had the chance to be vaccinated—now it is time for them to do their duty and fulfill their obligation to educate our students in person. I do appreciate that this has been a tough year without a playbook, but as educators, we know that our purpose is to educate students. If we are going to err—let's err on the side of providing the highest quality of education possible as we move forward to whatever the future is.

Best regards,

Jeremy M. McKenzie, MBA, MSSc, MPP
Parent of two Colchester students (WJJMS, and Bacon Academy)
912-659-6065

https://www.courant.com/coronavirus/hc-news-coronavirus-daily-updates-0419-20210419-7b5k47ujrnbq5n7wfjt7kyktym-story.html

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RECEIVED: APRIL 24, 2021

To the Board of Finance and the Board of Selectmen,

I have lived in Colchester for the past 11 years and have the privilege of now raising my children in town. Every year I listen carefully to the budget discussions and I am always concerned about the resistance to investing in the future of our town. Over the past few years I am deeply disappointed in some members of the Board of Finance failing to recognize the needs we have in town. This year I feel the need to speak up.

The budget process in Colchester is getting increasingly difficult and the services in town have slowly been taken away due to the reductions made every year. Since moving to town I have heard of many people leaving town hall because of the lack of raises coupled with the increased workload leading to town employees leaving for other towns, at higher salaries and increased professional respect. I have had to increasingly pay for services in town because the town is less able to maintain public spaces. Town events, such as concerts on the green, the 57fest, and others either require incredible fundraising or are canceled because the budget doesn't support them. I understood the need to pull back budgets last year in a time of need, but throughout the years we have slowly been pushing off costs to the "next year's" budget and then pushing things off again the next year. It always seems to be a small contingent of voices that

are pushing for more and more reductions in the proposed budgets, which means that the overall spending is reduced because of the rising costs of goods every year. The inability of this Committee to identify and secure the needed revenue to provide for the needs and interests of the community is deeply concerning. Deferring projects and underfunding services does not speak to a commitment to building a strong, vibrant community.

Every year I hear from the same familiar contingent of negative voices that we are going to lose taxpayers if we raise taxes. What you don't hear is that you are losing taxpayers because the town is losing the things that attracted them here in the first place. I personally have known five families that have moved out of Colchester, not because the taxes were too high, but because the events and services that brought their family to town have either been canceled or now are cost prohibitive. They moved to towns where services are provided, parks and fields are maintained and updated, and schools are valued by the community of taxpayers with no children in the system. I was infuriated that during a discussion of the budget, the first thing on the chopping block was playground equipment so young families can enjoy our RecPlex. The casual way this was thrown out by members of the Board shows a lack of caring about young families in our town. The company and town came up with an incredible deal to subsidize the cost of an expensive playground and the Board seems to only be looking to cut costs and not invest in the future of this town. This goes for many items in the budget discussions and often appears that some members of the Board of Finance find it easier to attack the person that proposed the budget item rather than the merits of why the item was proposed.

I am also astounded by the utter lack of investment in Colchester Public Schools. I have been following the budget process for years and it seems that the proposed budget is consistently reduced to a point where it goes to paying for essential services and there is a lack of investment in improvements, training, and supplies for the district to stay current with other schools in the area. I am an educator and have had the privilege to visit and work with other districts, work with and in other schools, and have my children in Colchester Public Schools. Our teachers are dedicated to providing the best education for our students, but every town and city in the country says that about their teachers. I have seen teachers at all levels work towards improving their practice and becoming better teachers but there has been a consistent lack of investment from the town so teachers are provided funding to help attend conferences, get training from professionals, or obtain supplies. Colchester is falling behind current trends in education because there is a lack of investment in the future of our children and our community. Local funding for our schools compared to towns around us is the second lowest in the area based on the 2018-2019, only beating Montville by $117 per student and was 4th lowest in overall funding per pupil when compared to Marlborough, East Hampton, Montville, Hebron, Salem, Glastonbury, Region 8, Middletown, Lebanon, and East Haddam.

After listening to the budget presentations I strongly support the proposals from the Town and the Board of Education as proposed. The proposals meet the needs for the coming fiscal year while also responsibly planning for the future. I encourage the Finance Committee and the Selectboard to stand behind these budget proposals. Furthermore, I encourage the Finance Committee and Selectboard to adopt a growth mindset and begin looking for opportunities to invest in the community, not just widdle away services and push off fundraising responsibilities

to community members. We should not have to argue with our community officials about supporting investments in the community where we have chosen to live and work.

Matthew Parsons
218 Taylor Rd

RECEIVED MAY 2, 2021

Dear Board of Finance Members,
I am writing to express my support of both the Town and Education budgets, "As Is." Colchester is long overdue for maintenance and upkeep. Keeping these necessary expenses in the budgets as presented will well-position the town for success as we come out of the pandemic.
I am a senior citizen and on a fixed income, so I understand the hesitance for a tax increase. However you can't put off the inevitable and these expenses are necessary to stave off more expensive corrections down the road..

Thank you for your consideration.
Joan Cahill RN, BA
122 Prospect Hill Rd

RECEIVED: MAY 2, 2021

Hi,

I have heard about the plan to cut the budget from the youth of colchester. That is a horrible mistake. The current playground is so old and it needs to be replaced. It gets used all the time year round by so many people and is such an asset to the community. It is a place for children to make memories and meet new friends. The amount of money the town needs to pay for this project is so minimal when you look at the overall budget. So much is being donated and funded through donation. To not subsidize the rest would be crazy. My family and I moved to colchester because of everything the town had to offer and it would be horrible to see something like this get cut. By cutting the budget you are taking away from the kids. I would prefer my taxes increase and all the money go to the schools that they see fit. I also know many other parents who feel the same. This is the future we are talking about. Please take this into consideration.

Thank you

Sarah Manfre

RECEIVED MAY 3, 2021
To the Board of Finance,
My name is Abigail Dunbar-Willbanks. My husband and I moved to Colchester in the beginning of 2016. We chose this town for its beauty and opportunity to raise our family in a close and active community,

In 2020, my family along with countless others experienced the effects of the pandemic. Schools closed, all activities cancelled and my children were stuck without the comfort of a routine that the town-run activities gave them. The parks and recreation facilities that Colchester has was a comfort to us. It provided a safe outdoor experience while being able to see friendly faces. It gave my kids a sense of normalcy in such a time of turbulence and uncertainty.

As the Health and Safety chair at the Colchester Cooperative Nursery school, I see our families invest their time and effort into their children's growth and education. We as parents rely on our board of education and town to maintain a high standard of programming that will attract more families to the area.

My two children, toddler and preschool age have grown so much through the programming this town has provided. Classes such as "Joyful Noise" and "It Takes a Village" parent groups led by Colchester Children's Collaborative, or "Music and Movement" at the library have given them a space to learn and play. It also supports us as parents. We need that community networking as we continue to work and struggle to get to a new normal. We look forward to watching our family grow up in a town that offers such support.

Please, continue to invest in our children and families
Sincerely,
Abigail Dunbar-Willbanks RN, BSN

RECEIVED MAY 3, 2021

Hello,

I would like to let my feelings be known about the proposed budget for the playground at the Rec Plex. I am very much in favor of restoring the playground. I feel very strongly that this is an asset to our community, a place that allows our children a fun and safe environment to play in and socialize. This is necessary for their development and a worthy investment in my opinion. It is definitely part of the reason we enjoy living in Colchester for our children's sake.

Thank you for your consideration.
Sincerely,
Alyson Darvas

RECEIVED MAY 3, 2021

I am writing to indicate my support of the town and Board of Education budgets. The budgets presented include investments in the town and schools that are necessary if we want to continue to grow and support our town and our students. Please move these budgets forward as presented.

Sincerely,
Wendy Moores

RECEIVED: MAY 4, 2021

Good evening,

I wanted to take a moment and express my support of the BOE budget. I am absolutely in favor of the proposed BOE budget. Our youth and teachers have faced so much over the past year, cutting any funding from education would be detrimental to the educational well being or our youth. NOW is the time we should rally and show our support for our youth and our educators. When the pandemic began we all struggled to shift gears and adapt. Our youth suffered the most and our educators went above and beyond during this time. We need to step up as a community and take care of our youth and the educators. Do NOT cut education funding. We cannot allow our children to be put on the back burner.

Thank you for your time,
Nicole Hosford

RECEIVED: MAY 7, 2021

Kenneth Rauccio

(to boardquestions@colchesterct.org)

Hello Board,

Now that the school admins and teachers have either gotten a vaccine or had the opportunity to get one, when can we remove the masks from our children or make them optional? As I'm sure you all know, kids have never even been affected by this virus, but masks and distancing on the other hand do a lot of physical and psychological damage to our kids and this has gone on long enough.

Thanks,

Ken (parent)